

## Abstract

Idaho Forest Highway 80 (ID PFH 80), commonly known as Fernan Lake Road, is a two-lane paved road between the City of Coeur d'Alene and Fernan Saddle, a geographic feature in the Idaho Panhandle National Forests (IPNF) in Kootenai County. Fernan Lake Road is the most heavily used road on the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District of the IPNF. Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) records show it has a much higher accident rate than similar roads statewide. East Side Highway District (ESHD) reports it has the poorest conditions of all the roads it maintains. The road was constructed in the 1930s and has been improved over the years, but lacks stormwater treatment to protect the water quality of Fernan Lake and Creek.

The Western Federal Lands Highway Division of FHWA is the lead agency for project development, environmental evaluation, preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and a Record of Decision (ROD), and construction contract management of Fernan Lake Road Safety Improvement Project. IPNF, ITD, and ESHD are partner agencies and participants on the FHWA's Social, Economic, and Environmental (SEE) team.

FHWA and the partner agencies propose to reconstruct or resurface 17.2 km (10.7 mi) of Fernan Lake Road. The road is divided into three segments for this project:

- Segment 1, MP 0.0 to MP 2.2, mostly along the north shore of Fernan Lake,
- Segment 2, MP 2.2 to MP 5.0, along the west side of lower Fernan Creek, and
- Segment 3, MP 5.0 to MP 10.7, entirely in IPNF along steep upper Fernan Creek.

In response to public comments during the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, ten alternative routes that mostly avoided Fernan Lake Road altogether, and seven preliminary designs that made extensive use of the current road alignment, were evaluated by the SEE team. All ten alternative routes were eliminated from further consideration because they failed to meet the project purpose, needs, and/or objectives. Four preliminary designs were eliminated because only minor reductions in accidents could be expected when compared to the existing road, in spite of substantial road widening that in turn would cause substantial environmental impacts.

Three build alternatives (E, Fm, and G), and the No Action (No Reconstruction) Alternative are fully analyzed in the Draft EIS. All three build alternatives would reconstruct Segments 1 and 2 of the existing road, whereas only maintenance resurfacing and culvert improvements are proposed for Segment 3 within the IPNF boundary. The three build alternatives primarily differ between MP 1.0 and the end of Segment 1. Alternatives E and G differ in the location and configuration of the bridge proposed across Lilypad Bay. Otherwise both essentially follow the alignment of the existing road. Alternative Fm leaves the current alignment near MP 1.0, climbs the adjacent hillside, and while descending the hill, avoids Lilypad Bay by crossing this area farther to the north.

Except for differences to accommodate the transition between Segments 1 and 2, Alternatives E, Fm, and G are very similar in Segment 2. All three raise the road profile above the 100-year flood elevation. The required widening of the road prism to accommodate the increase in road profile causes the road base to extend into wetlands and Fernan Creek channels that are immediately adjacent to the existing road. There is no difference among the three build alternatives in Segment 3.

The three primary reasons to construct one of the build alternatives are:

- To maintain a safe transportation link between the City of Coeur d'Alene and IPNF at Fernan Saddle that efficiently accommodates traffic projected through 2026.
- To upgrade stormwater treatment along Fernan Lake Road to protect water quality in Fernan Creek and Fernan Lake.
- To provide a roadway that can be reasonably maintained in a sustainable manner by ESHD.

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The SEE team unanimously selected Alternative G as the preferred alternative. The selection considered advantages and potential disadvantages of Alternatives E, Fm, and G, as well as the No-Action Alternative, in terms of the following factors:

- Overall Purpose and Need
- Improved Traffic Safety
- Impacts to the Physical Environment
- Impacts to Fish, Wildlife, and Plant Populations and Habitat
- Impacts to the Human Environment
- Reduced Road Maintenance
- Constructability, including estimated construction cost
- New Right-of-Way Required
- Degree of Risk or Uncertainty (unknowns that might delay final design or permitting, or interrupt construction).

Alternative G had either highest or moderate ratings for all factors considered in selecting the preferred alternative. This alternative would most closely follow the existing road alignment. Construction of the new curved bridge across Lilypad Bay would occur behind the existing causeway, thus protecting the lake from related short-term impacts to water quality. Alternative G would have fewer visual impacts than the other two build alternatives. All of the improvements in traffic safety, stormwater treatment, roadway maintenance, and parking along the lake that are found in the other build alternatives would be provided by Alternative G.

This Draft EIS is open to public comment and review until July 31, 2004, 45 days after the Notice of Availability was published the *Federal Register*. Comments concerning this Draft EIS should be sent to

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Comments can also be submitted electronically via the Internet. The Draft EIS is available for review at <http://www.wfl.fhwa.dot.gov/projects/fernan/> where you can find directions for submitting comments.

Copies of the Draft EIS can be reviewed at the following locations:

Idaho Panhandle National Forests  
Supervisor's Office  
2502 Sherman Ave.  
Coeur d'Alene, ID 83814

Idaho Panhandle National Forests  
Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District  
2502 East Sherman Avenue  
Coeur d'Alene, ID 83814

Federal Highway Administration  
Western Federal Lands Highway Div.  
610 East Fifth Street  
Vancouver, WA 98661

East Side Highway District  
6095 E. Mullen Trail Road  
Coeur d'Alene, ID 83814

Kootenai County Planning Department  
451 Government Way  
Coeur d'Alene, ID 83814

FHWA – Idaho Division  
3050 Lakeharbor Lane, Suite 126  
Boise ID 83703

Idaho Transportation Department  
600 W. Prairie Ave.  
Coeur d'Alene, ID 83815

City of Coeur d'Alene Planning Dept.  
710 Mullen Ave  
Coeur d'Alene, ID 83814

Coeur d'Alene Public Library  
201 East Harrison Ave.  
Coeur d'Alene, ID 83814

Spokane Public Library  
906 W. Main  
Spokane, WA 99201